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I. NOTES ON MODERN BURIAL CUSTOMS

BY

H. R. VOTH.



Photo by G. W. James. Courtesy of the Pass. Dept. of the A. T. & S. Fe. Ry.

PL. XXXIV.

Children's burial places, top view. The piles of the smaller stones at the edge of the mesa, on some of which sticks and food bowls may be seen, indicate the crevice graves.

NOTES ON MODERN BURIAL CUSTOMS OF THE HOPI¹ OF ARIZONA

I. INTRODUCTION.

The belief in a future state and in a continued existence after death is well defined in the religious conception and in many rites and ceremonies of the Hopi. That part of man which they believe to be immortal they call hikvsi. The fundamental meaning of this term seems to coincide with that expressed by the Hebrew "ruach," the German "Hauch" or the Greek "pneuma." In its practical application the hikvsi is to the Hopi what to us is the soul in its ethical sense. At death the hikvsi leaves the body. When asked whether it is this hikvsi or the deceased person that continues to live in the skeleton house, the average Hopi may get confused. He knows that the body of the dead decays, and believes that it is by virtue or through the part that escapes from the body through the mouth at death, that the dead continue their existence in the future world. The details, with regard to this fact, are more or less vague in the mind of the Hopi, and vary considerably in the different traditions, clans and villages.

This belief in a future state is not only manifested again and again in the different ceremonies of the Hopi, but it also plays a conspicuous part in their burial customs, as will be seen in the following pages.

2. THE DEATH CHAMBER.

While with civilized nations illness and impending death usually draws sympathy and helping hands to the place of affliction it is, as a rule, not so with the Hopi. To be sure, families visited by severe sickness or death will usually not be left entirely to themselves, but it is, generally, only either father or mother or some other of the older relatives of the bereaved that manifest sympathy or renders assistance. As a rule the sick, for whom little hope of recovery exists, and the dying are deserted by most of the relatives and friends. A few cases out of very many that came to the notice of the author, may be cited to illustrate this fact. Case 1: Coming into a room one day I found two young women whom I was well acquainted with, sitting close together, silently weeping. They were sisters. Before them lay a beautiful

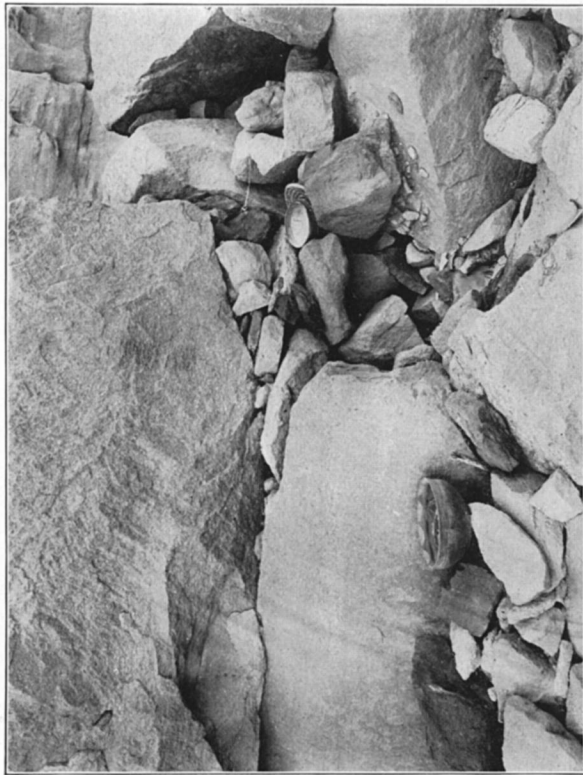
¹ While these customs are essentially the same on the three mesas, these brief observations refer more particularly to the village of Oraibi.

little child, dying. Upon my inquiry where the father of the child was, they told me, in one of the kivas (underground rooms). I immediately went there and found him at work. When I asked him whether he knew that his only child was dying, he at first would not answer, but finally began to abuse his wife and accuse her of being the cause of the child's illness and death. I reasoned with him, but could not persuade him to go home and to share the bereavement with his broken-hearted wife. Case 2. A young woman, who had been confined, became very ill, as far as I could learn, with puerperal fever. Her husband did not seem to show any interest in her whatsoever and when he was told one day, that she had died and been buried, he seemed to be utterly unconcerned about the matter and afterward completely ignored the little child his wife had left him. Even when this child died, two years later, he did not seem to show any interest in it whatsoever. The aged grandparents, who had taken care of the little orphan, prepared the little corpse all alone and put it into a large rock crevice, pushing aside the bones of its little brother who had been buried there four years previously. Case 3: One day I went through the village and was looking among others, after an old grandmother to whose wants we had administered since my wife had, one cold December morning, found her nearly frozen near a spring not far from our house. When I looked into her little room I found her unconscious on her sleeping place on the floor. It was in the afternoon and none of her numerous relatives had concerned themselves about the sick, aged woman. Soon I found one of her sons, a man about 53 years old, in one of the kivas where he was eating. He said he knew that his mother had seemed to be very sick in the morning; that he had placed a morsel of food and a cup of water by her side and had then gone to herd sheep; but instead of hurrying to his dying mother first of all, upon his return, of whom he knew that she had been left all to herself, he had first gone to his house, gotten some food for himself and was eating it apparently with utter unconcern. Case 4: A little girl, that had been sick with consumption for quite a while, died during the night. As far as I could learn only the immediate family had been present at her death. As soon as the usual preparations of the body could be made, the father wrapped it into blankets and carried it in the dark night, not accompanied by any one, on his back along a narrow, lonely trail over hills, through gulches, between boulders, up a mesa and there, on a ledge, he removed the stones that had been piled over a large crevice and placed the remains of his dead child with those of several others that had been "put away" there; replaced the stones and thrust a new stick between them as a sign of the new inhabitant of that dreary family burial place. When

PL. XXXV. CHILDREN'S BURIAL PLACES, SIDE VIEW.

- A. Graves under rocks, showing food bowls.
- B. Graves in large crevice, showing sticks in stone piles.

A



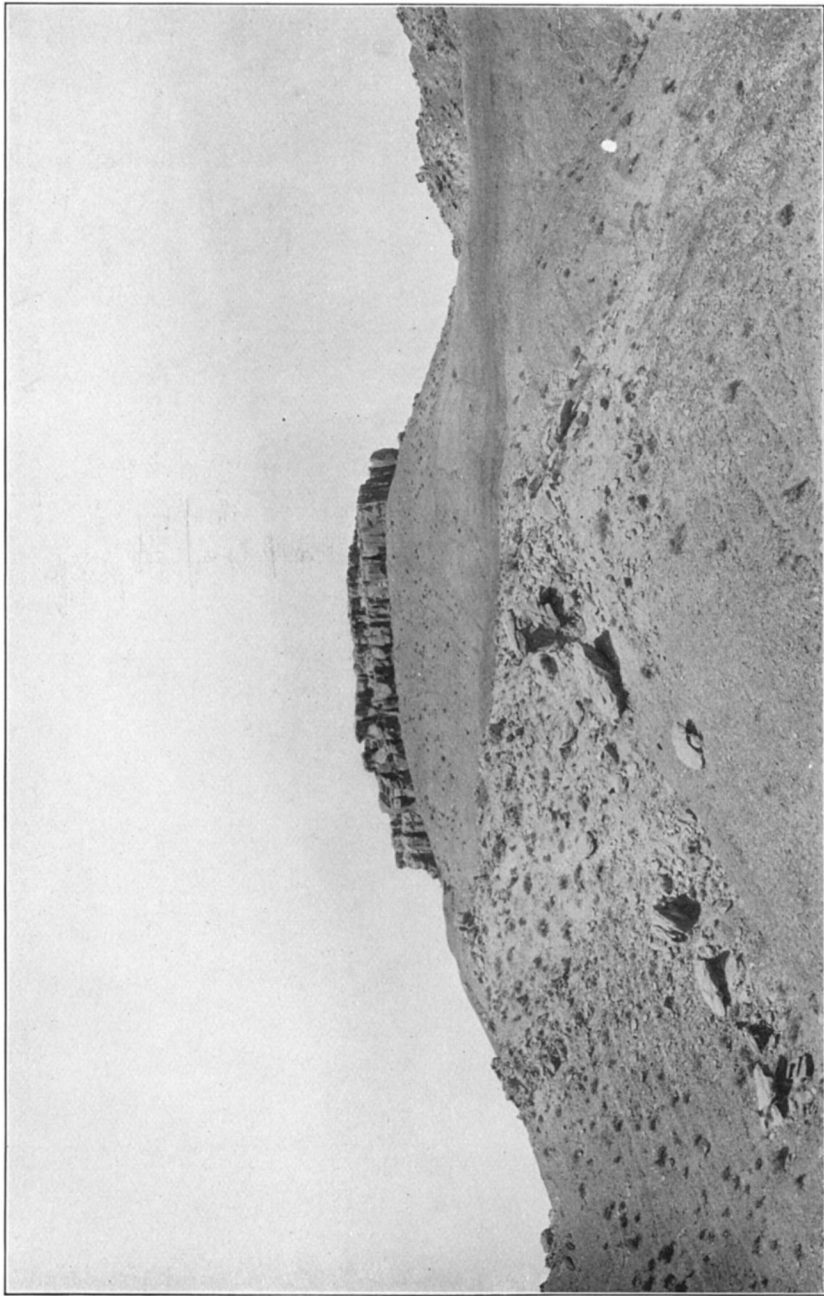
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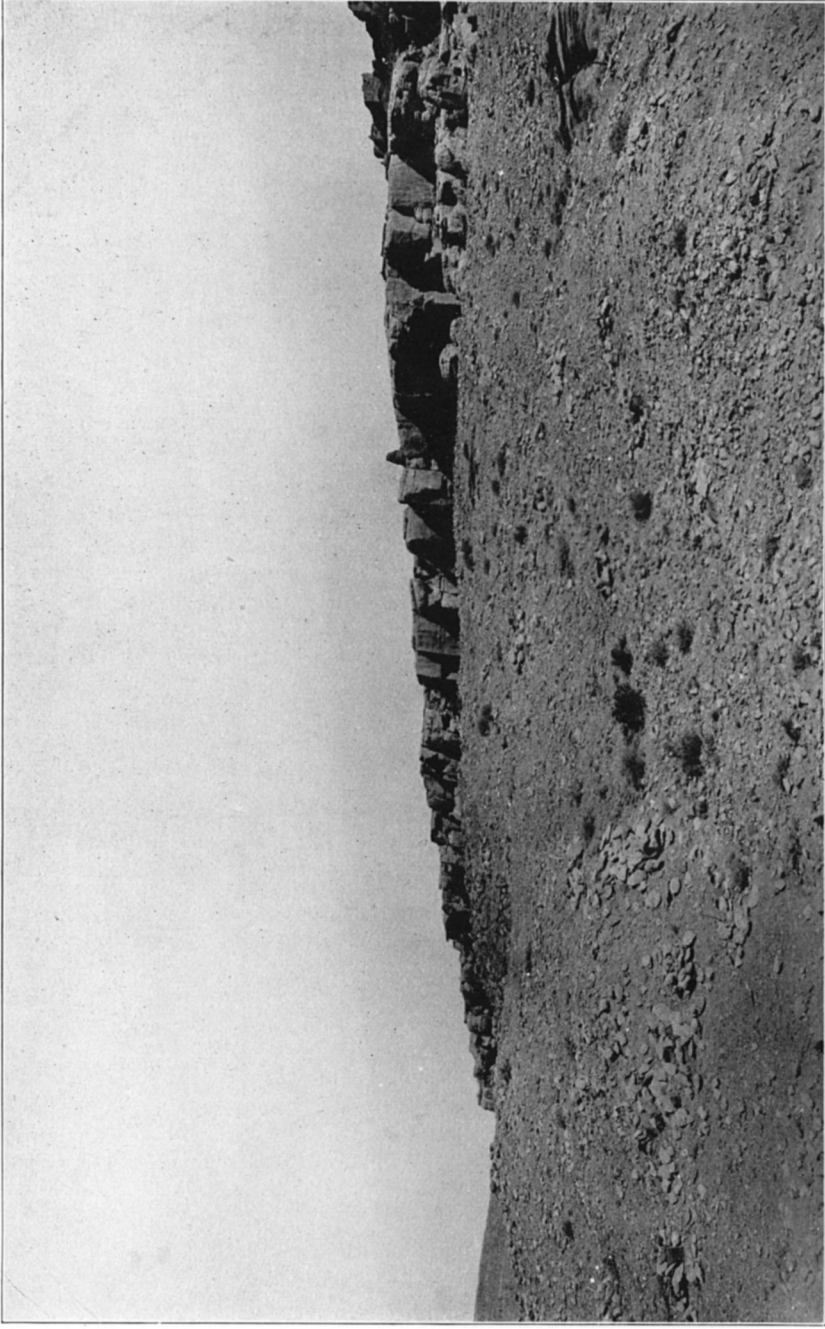


Photo by S. W. Matteson. Courtesy of the Pass. Dept. of the A. T. & S. Fe. Ry.

PL. XXXVI.

General graveyard near Second Mesa.

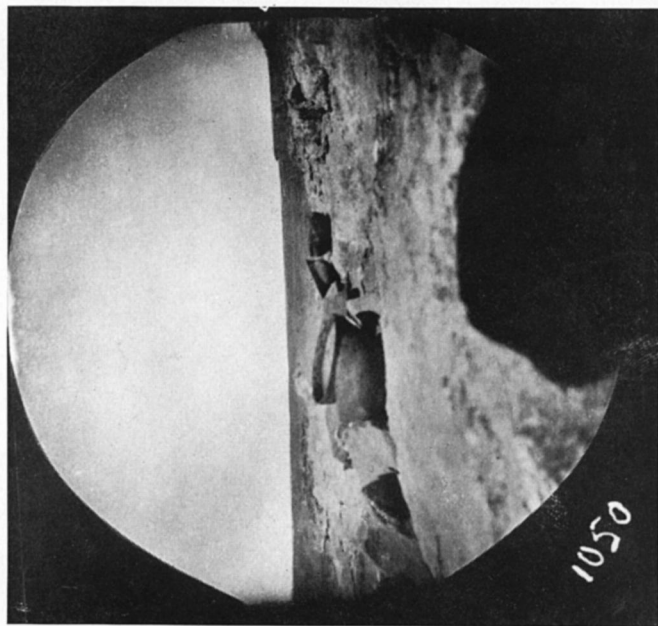




PL. XXXVII.

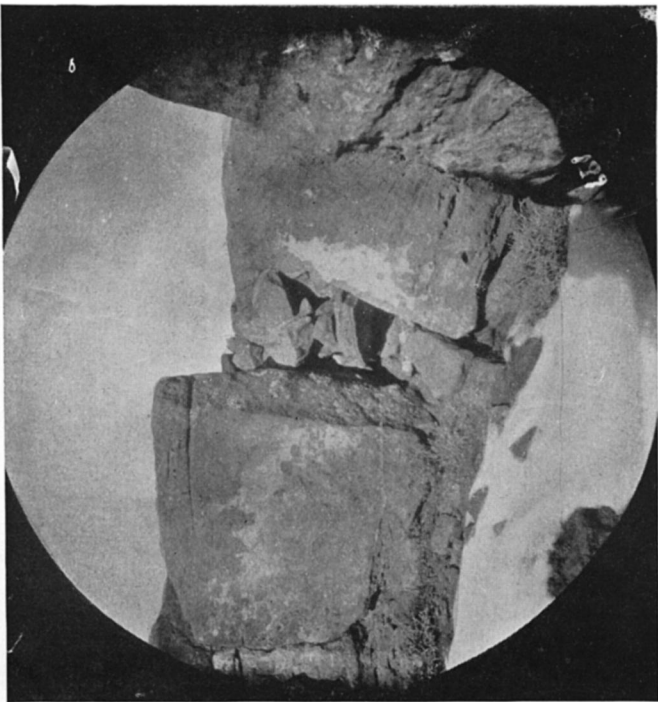
General graveyard near Oraibi.

FIELD MUSEUM OF NATURAL HISTORY.



A

ANTHROPOLOGY, PL. XXXVIII.



B

PL. XXXVIII. CHILDREN'S GRAVES.

- A. Graves, showing large bowls.
- B. Grave, showing side view.

he carried the usual prayer offerings and food to the grave on the third day I followed him over the same trail. Case 5: A man had died of gangrene in a broken leg. As the unfortunate man had had several peculiar attacks during his life it was extremely difficult to get any one to render any assistance while he was ill. One night, while we had left the patient to the care of his aged father a part of the time, the man had died towards morning and when we got to the house after breakfast we found that the man had died and the father, with the assistance of one relative had wrapped the body into blankets, taken it on his back, the relative supporting the legs, and the two men had thus dragged the very heavy corpse to a graveyard and buried him. Other similar cases could be cited, showing that death, or even approaching death, strikes such terror to the Hopi heart, that he shuns and flees the sick-bed and death-chamber as much as possible. For this reason he does not like to speak or hear others speak about the dead, however much he may have loved them and he prefers to say, "they are gone" or "they have gone to sleep" to saying, "they have died."

When death has taken place those that are present cry and mourn but do not lament and scream, as I have had occasion to observe among other tribes. Occasionally a few relatives will assemble in the death-chamber and weep, but those are exceptions. The remains are at once prepared for burial. A nakwakwosi is tied to the hair in front. The face is covered with a layer of cotton, with openings for the eyes and for the nose, which is tied by a string around the forehead "to hide themselves in." To this string are fastened a number of nakwakwosis which they are supposed to wear in the other world. Black marks are made under the eyes on the lips, forehead, cheeks (I think), the palms of the hands and the soles of the feet.¹ Some nakwakwosis² and sometimes a little food and a small vessel with drinking water is placed on the chest. The body is then wrapped into several blankets around which ropes are wound, and it is then carried on the back of the father or some relative, or on a horse or burrow to its last resting place.

3. THE BURIAL PLACES.

If the deceased be a child, which has not yet been initiated into any of the religious societies, the little body is placed into one of the many crevices along the edge of the mesa, on which the village is situated (see Plates XXXIV and XXXV).

In various ceremonies nakwakwosis are prepared for the dead and deposited in shrines and other places where the dead come and get those prepared for them; and those who find none are said to be very

¹ The faces of small children are sometimes only daubed with corn-meal.

² Turkey or eagle feathers are used.

sorry and to cry. In one of the traditions the dead in the other world are said to complain to a visitor from this world, that their *nakwakwosis* before their faces are old and worn and that their friends forget to prepare new ones for them.¹ If the burial place already contains the remains or bones of other children, that have died in that particular family, the stones, covering them, are removed, the new bundle placed into the crevice and the stones replaced. For every child thus buried a stick, from one to two feet long, is thrust between the rocks. After the covering of the buried remains has rotted away, the skull or bones may sometimes be seen in the crevice grave (see Plate XXXV).

In the case of grown persons or in fact, anyone that is already a *wimkya* (member) of some fraternity, the body is buried in a graveyard which is usually on a slope of the mesa or of a hill near the mesa (see Plate XXXVI). A hole from five to seven feet deep is dug and the body placed into it in a sitting posture with the face towards the east. The hole is filled up with the earth or sand and usually a lot of stones placed on it (see Plate XXXVII).

These burial grounds are scattered around the mesas; they are not marked or enclosed, nor taken care of in any way whatsoever. It not infrequently happens, that either the windstorms blow away the sand exposing the bones or currents of water from the high mesas break their way through a burial place and carry them away.

Tombstones or similar signs or monuments, marking the last resting place of particular individuals, are unknown; but certain insignia, indicating the order to which the deceased belonged, are occasionally placed on the graves, such as the so-called *Marau-vahos* (see my paper on the *Marau* ceremony), which are placed on the graves of women having belonged to the *Marau* society, or *mungskohos* which may be found on graves of members of the *Kwan* (Agave) or *Ahl* (Horn) or other societies. (See Plate LV in my paper, "The *Oraibi* *Powamu* Ceremony.")

4. POST-MORTEM RITES.

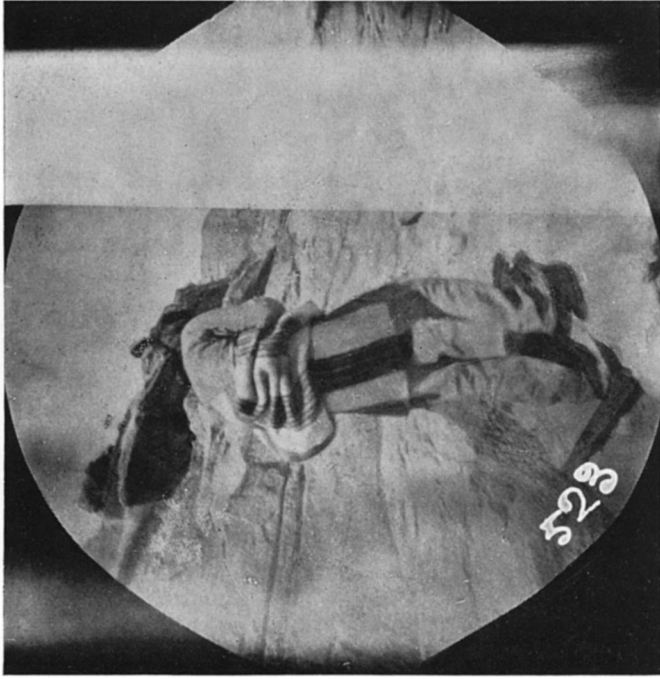
On the third day, after the body has been buried, the last meal and the last prayer offerings are prepared. The first consists of *piki* (a thin wafer bread baked on large polished stone slabs), cooked beans, (*oöngawa*), and sometimes a stew of corn, meat, herbs, etc., (*nöekwiwi*), is prepared by the woman, mother, wife, aunt or other near relative. This food is put into a bowl which is placed on the grave on the third day where it remains (see Plates XXXV and XXXVII). The father, brother or uncle of the deceased, that has prepared the remains for burial, now makes one double green *baho* (prayer stick, with black

¹ See the author's "Traditions of the Hopi Indians," page 119.

PL. XXXIX.

- A. Man taking prayer offerings to the grave.**
- B. Man arranging prayer offerings at the grave.**

FIELD MUSEUM OF NATURAL HISTORY.



A

ANTHROPOLOGY, PL. XXXIX.



B

FIELD MUSEUM OF NATURAL HISTORY.



A

ANTHROPOLOGY, PL. XL.



B

PL. XL.

- A. Man, praying over the offerings to be deposited on the grave of his children.**
- B. Depositing the prayer offerings.**

points), one single black baho, called chochokpi (seat), a pühu (road), consisting of an eagle breath feather. To this are tied two cotton strings, a shorter one, twisted several times, the other a single thread, but somewhat longer. Besides this he makes about six nakwakwosis. All this the one who makes the prayer offerings takes to the grave (see Plate XXXIX) towards evening and places the two prayer sticks, the nakwakwosis, some corn-meal and the bowl with food on the grave (see Plate XL), the road he places on the ground west of the grave, the thin string pointing westward. From this road he sprinkles a meal line westward denoting the continuation of the road. According to a belief of the Hopi the hikvsi (breath or soul) of the deceased ascends early the next morning from the grave, partakes of the hikvsi of the food, mounts the hikvsi of the seat and then travels along the road to the masski (skeleton house) taking the hikvsi of the double baho along as an offering. (Comp. Voth: "Traditions of the Hopi," pages 109 and 114.) In the case of the death of a small child, that has not yet been initiated into any societies, the road is made from the grave towards the home of the child, because it is believed that the soul of that child returns to the house of its parents and is reincarnated in the next child that is born in that family. Until that time the little soul is believed to hover over the house. It is said, that when an unusual noise is heard in the house, for instance a crackling in the roof, they think the little soul is moving about and the mother then often secretly deposits a pinch of food on the floor in some part of the house for her departed child. When I asked one time what became of that child-soul in case no further birth took place in the family, I was told, that in such a case the soul remained near the house until its mother died, who then took the little soul with her to the other world.

Later the dead are sometimes remembered by prayer offerings and food in such ceremonies as the Soyal, Marau, etc. (See the "Oraibi Soyal Ceremony" by Dorsey and Voth, page 57, and my paper on the "Oraibi Marau Ceremony," page 30.)